United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service
6013 Lakeside Boulevard
Indianapolis, IN 46278

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Indiana Bulletin: IN 430-8-4

Subject: SOI – HEL Determinations on Mined Lands

Purpose: To provide field offices guidance on how to handle HEL Determinations on Mined Lands.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2008

Background: During the past 2 1/2 years, the South West Area had about 40 requests to conduct HEL determinations on mined lands or reclaimed mined land that have been returned to crop production. These 40 requests have included 110 different fields, totaling about 2,548.7 acres. All of the 110 different fields were determined to be HEL.

There are two primary reasons why reclaimed mined lands turn out to be HEL:

1) The k value is normally 0.49 or 0.55. The high k factors usually result from a decrease in organic matter content due to mixing of or loss of topsoil during the mining process, as well as the total destruction of soil structure (at least temporarily), increased compaction, and slower permeability.

2) During the mining process, the slope lengths are significantly increased. It's not uncommon to see a reclaimed field with a 1 to 2% slope but having a slope length in excess of 800 to 1000 feet.

The annual cost of making HEL determinations on these mined lands is estimated to be about $4800 per year, with total staff time involved to be about 18 days. In light of the fact that the HEL determination seems to be a foregone conclusion on these lands, this is not the best use of our limited time and dollars.

Therefore, all surface mined lands that have been reclaimed and are being returned to crop production will automatically be considered HEL. The District Conservationist or Soil Conservationist will make the determination themselves and process the determination without the need of a soil investigation. The producer, of course, can always exercise his/her rights of appeal.

If there are questions, please direct them to Travis Neely, State Soil Scientist, (317) 290-3200, ext. 380 or Rick Neilson, Soil Scientist, (317) 290-3200, ext. 375.

/s/

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State Conservationist

DIST: SW Area Office
All NRCS SW Offices